



Depot Town Rag

Volume 17, Number 7 "All the news in one block in one month."

100% FREE
Rag Content
July 1994

- Death Trip II
- Depot fax and quiz
- Signs & Renewed Interest
- Fire damage traced 109 years!
and other strictly local stuff. . .

A Publication of the DEPOT TOWN ASSOCIATION, INC. The Old Caboose, 400 Market Place. Ypsilanti, MI 48198

Al fresco Ypsilanti takes on a whole new flavor down at the depot



Sometimes it's just eating an ice cream cone as you walk along the sidewalk; other times *al fresco* can be as complex and satisfying as a full-course meal served in the out-of-doors.

It's the season of picnics and cook-outs and even this tiny pocket of antique civilization rises to the occasion when the weather turns so nice that nobody can stand to stay indoors another minute. Look at the opportunities up and down Cross and River Streets:

- **Miller's Ice Cream Parlour & Emporium** continues to offer a good sit-down spot for the iced goodies - as well as breakfast, lunch and dinner.

- The tiny fenced-in patio at the **Sidetrack Grill** offers an intimate and unique spot for a drink or a meal. Tucked into the corner where a cigar shop was removed by the Great Train Wreck of 1939, the well-designed spot is a street furniture jewel marking the center of the district. "You're here! This is the neighborhood you've been hearing about," says this triangle of charm at the corner of Cross and River.

- **Aubree's Saloon** has a new green picket fence marking the boundaries of their umbrellaed tables in front of that old railroad saloon. It's a sidewalk café unrivaled by anything in Europe.

- Upstairs and in the back is an even bigger surprise - hanging out from the rear entry of **Sticks** and above the plaza is a deck of generous proportions and great outdoor cookery.

- Across the street is a phalanx of even more umbrellaed tables in front of **Old Town Café** and **Cady's Grill**. You can ask for a menu from either establishment and get the same excellent service.

- Crossing the street again you'll find the tables at the **Daily Grind** where coffee drinkers have the long view of the block to watch the exciting summer comings and goings of this old commercial district.

One satisfying summer afternoon at any of these locations is enough to assure any patron of why this district just keeps keeping on the way it does.



District's namesake getting attention

Nearly twenty years after the publication of *The Depot Town Plan* most of the district down by Ypsilanti's depot looks like it's way ahead of schedule - with a few notable exceptions. Earlier this spring our attention was focused by the City upon the Thompson Block with threats and promises in great abundance. Now, at the height of the building season, the property looks no different from the street.

The train depot, across River Street, seems also to have slid into neglect again. Despite 'no parking' signs banning customers of other district businesses, there seems to have been little done to the depot since its tower was replicated several years ago; the construction scaffolding still stands on the track side of the building. Tuck-pointing, painting, a new roof and other practical repairs were obvious several seasons ago, but nothing appears to have followed what seemed like the long-awaited good start.

The district held its breath two months ago when parking was banned, hoping to see a new flurry of activity at the district's focal point. Calls to the owners have gone unanswered, but optimism remains. It's the district's best operational style.

Some depot history:

1837 - First depot completed in preparation for the railway west.

1838 - First train to Ypsilanti carried Governor Steves T. Mason and other dignitaries aboard. Following a brass band arrival, banquet and speeches, on their return trip to Detroit the engine broke down and they were towed home by teams of horses.

1850s - Original wood structure replaced by three-story Victorian brick building.

1887 - MCCR spur track added, creates excellent factory sties.

1890s - Telegraphy taught at Cleary college to supply growing railroad industry.

1900 - Michigan Central Gardens established and maintained by station agent Damon and landscape gardener John Laidlaw.

[Continued with photos and quiz pp. 2,3,& 5]

Depot Town: As seen on TV!



Merchants have organized for a group ad on cable TV stations and the camera crews were all over the district on a Saturday in June. Sandee French reports the crew shot some film in each and every one of the thirty sponsors of the unique commercial for the block and everyone is watching their TV screens for the first airing.

With a short time space for the ad, the producers promise 'very quick' looks and many of the district's amenities. Imagine their perplexity when trying to shoot a video in a neighborhood with so much to see! Production watchers up and down the block are eager to see what made it through the final editing.

23 October 1869

- A Horrible Case

Friday morning week as the 2:10 train was crossing the first Lowell Bridge it ran over a man whose name is still an enigma. He was found literally torn to pieces. Near by was found a bottle. Being a total stranger the supposition is that he sought to steal a ride, and being intoxicated lost his hold and thus lost his life.

13 November 1869 - Fatal Accident

We record another fearful accident, resulting in the death of Mr. John Landmann. The 5th inst., he and several other repairers were upon a hand car at Kellogg's Curve, (between here and Ann Arbor) when an engine - a Mr. Cole engineer - came thundering along. The repairers jumped from the hand car and sought to remove it, but before they could do so, the engine struck it, smashing it up and scattering splinters, tools &c, in all directions. Mr. Landmann was stuck by a fragment, crushing a leg, below the knee. He was brought immediately home and the limb amputated by Dr. Bartwell. He lived until Sunday afternoon. We understand that Mr. L. has been in the employ of the road 17 years. The Company has the reputation of doing the fair thing in such cases and we presume the family will be the recipient of favors due to such long and faithful service.

9 April 1870 - Death By Accident

Last Saturday, on the track train west of Ypsilanti, Michael Nolan was killed. He had grasped hold of the two adjoining racks to spring on. The engine started up and thus widened the space so quickly as to hurl him under the wheels of the train. Singular as it may appear, after one wheel had passed over his head he cried out. Though the brakes were put on almost instantaneously, yet it was unavailing, and the poor man was taken to his distressed family a corpse. He was an industrious man. He leaves a wife and three children. Out of his last month's pay he had just finished paying for his place. St. John's Benevolent Association turned out in a body and buried him. Complaint has been made because of the lack of time given to get on the train. A whistle, and starting immediately, compelling the men to spring on as best they could. The sad accident will probably inaugurate a reform.

16 June 1870 - Ran Off the Track

Thursday forenoon the engine "Goliath" was coming from the west with eight freight cars attached - cattle train. The switchman had, by a thoughtless mistake, left the Hillsdale switch at the west end of the bridge open. The result was the engine was thrown off the track and most of the cars, plowing fearfully into the cross pieces and raising the very mischief. The force of the shock forced open a door and a couple of cows fell

James Thomas Mann's

Depot Town Death Trip

Part II

Ypsilanti train wreck headlines:

Runs off tracks, June 1870
Smash up, January 1874
Smash up, June 1874
Trains collide, August 1883
Engine explodes, May 1894
Small wreck, November 1894
Worst wreck ever, November 1894
Rear-end collision,

reached the Depot, when a arm was found adhering to the engine. Parties going to the spot found the body terribly mangled. A warning against walking on the track, especially in the case of persons old or deaf.

26 January 1872 - Fatal Accident

Will Allen, a young man well known to many in our city, especially to the east side residents, was killed while coupling cars last Monday afternoon. He was employed about the depot, having charge of the switches, and assisting in making-up trains, etc. A freight car ran off the track on the flour mill siding, and he and a number of others were endeavoring to replace it. After they were all ready, the engineer of the shifting engine backed up toward the car, which was turned in such a manner as not to leave the usual space between it and the next when they met, and Will, apparently not noticing the fact, stepped between to couple them, and received the force of the collision compressing his chest, and probably killing him instantly. It created intense excitement all about, crowds flocking to learn the truth, and many to express their sympathy in kind acts and words. The funeral services were held in the Methodist Church on Wednesday afternoon, and were largely attended. Will leaves a widow, mother and a sister, who were in great measure dependent upon him for support. His father died last Spring, and this additional bereavement falls upon hearts still tender. We commend them to Him "who doeth all things well," and who, though seemingly severe at times, being wiser than we. . . [More next month!]

out upon the bridge and were considerably injured. Switchmen cannot be too careful.

21 January 1871

- John Starkweather

Last Wednesday evening on his return home from the city Mr. S. attempted to cross the Hillsdale track in the face of the coming passenger train. Either because he did not see

or hear the train or because he thought that he would have ample time. (A risk that no one ought to make.) The engine hit his sulky and threw him into the gutter along side the track, smashing up the sulky, though the horse escaped uninjured. The engineer stopped the train and Mr. S. was picked up and taken to the Follett House. His face was disfigured somewhat, but he has received no mortal or serious injury. It was a close call for John. "In an hour when ye think not the son of man cometh."

6 January 1872 - R.R. Accident and Death

Last Monday evening the Mail Train going East struck an old man by the name of George Hulme, (aged 85 years), on the upper bridge. The smoke and steam prevented the engineer seeing ahead thirty feet, and the fact of the accident was not known until the train

Depot history

continued from page one

1910 - Top floor of depot destroyed by fire. Building remodeled to present low I profile.

1913 - Nationally known landscape architects, the Olmstead Brothers, survey Ypsilanti and recommend moving depot south on River Street to provide more stock yard space nearer Michigan Avenue. No action.

1939 - Short tower and end of block (next to Sidetrack Grill) destroyed by train wreck.

1960s - '70s - MCRR becomes Penn Central becomes New York Central becomes Conrail/Amtrak.

1978 - MCRR depot included as a 'jewel' in the Ypsilanti Historic District and is protected by City Ordinance.

1979 - Tickets for The Wolverine, the Saint Clair and the Twilight Limited between Detroit and Chicago now available only in Ann Arbor. Still, more than fifty passengers board the Michigan Executive each weekday morning at Ypsilanti.

1982 - Save The Depot Task Force organized within Ypsilanti Area Futures researches the building and finds insurance photos of "every piece of real estate, including wire shacks and outhouses on the railroad property since 1915." Unite Construction Company has plan for rehabilitation of depot with local architect, restaurateur, financial entrepreneurs and Amtrak. After a year the plan failed.

1986 - City has UDAG grant for \$145,000 to help Depot Crossing Limited restore building. Deal falls through.

1987 - City aids Jacadalo, Inc. in purchase agreement from Amtrak. Owners complete some renovation to property.

1991 - Owners permit local DDA to replicate Signal Tower on their land at the crossing.

1994 - Depot grounds barricaded to deny parking. Owners refuse comment on building's future.



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A Neighborhood Forgotten by Time (and Life and Newsweek)

Signs of our times

Following one of the district's oldest traditions of signage, more of the businesses on the block have erected flat sign boards above their transom windows.

- **Winding River Originals** boasts a beautifully hand-painted version of some of the great works found in their gallery of creative works.

- **Remington/Walker's** new board hangs above the entry in gleaming brass with matching pineapples repeating the 'hospitality' motif of another age. They're in the process of adding more staff and more hours to their work week, too.

- **Eastern Michigan University's Depot Town Center** added their name atop the new headquarters in the district and it takes up a lot more space than "The Normal School" would have years ago - but then, the Normal wouldn't let their teachers-in-training come back to the depot after arriving in 19th century Ypsilanti, anyway. All that's changed today.

- **First of America Bank's** modern and high tech ATM under EMU's awning doesn't seem to create any conflict with all this old fashioned commerical tradition. Merchants up and down the block are happy to see a money machine made available for their customers at long last. It seems a perfect blend of modern technology and traditional business ethics.

Dateline: Depot Town

Renewed Interest antiques opens with new interior

Judy and Roger Julie have been attending to the re-make of Cross Street Antiques for more than a month now - and they're finally open on both floors. It's an all new inside for their antique consignment items. Taking over the business from Jan Gower, the Julies have updated their interior and given the business a great new name: **Renewed Interest**.

One of the best ways to meet our new merchants is to just walk in and introduce yourself - and then ask for a quick tour of the new digs. They'll be happy to have you see their greatly expanded line of individual shops throughout their enterprise.

Can you canoe and canoe?

Yes, if you call **Moby Dicks, Ltd.** for canoe rentals on the Huron. Moby will meet you with canoe(s) at Dixboro Road, Pen Papermill, Riverside Park, the Ford Generator Plant or Rawsonville Road - at almost every entry point in this fifteen mile stretch of the river.

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John Barr

FOR DISTRICT JUDGE



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Ypsilanti Heritage Festival
August 19, 20, 21, 1994

Riverside Park, Depot Town & Frog Island Park

The "What's going on at the depot?" quiz

Just reading the recently placed 'no parking' signs in front of the ancient and empty depot for which this district is named won't help you to assess the progress at that address. Even the daily newspapers have not been able to get a definitive response from the owners, so this month's entertainment will be in the form of a guessing game: Guess what's going on over there! Here are some possibilities to ponder:

1. Why has parking been banned at the MCRR depot in Ypsilanti?

A. They're turning it into a giant Amtrack station to take pressure off Detroit.

B. We're finally getting a fast food franchise.

C. The Superfast Train of The Future is going to leave the tracks at that spot.

D. Another restaurant is planned for that location and construction workers need the staging space for materials.

2. Why does the depot look like that?

A. Early architects competed from Detroit to Chicago and this was the most outrageous design plan.

B. The top floors and towers burned and the first floor roofed in.

C. Several train wrecks pounded what was left and this is all that's left.

D. Remodeling over the past decade has taken the exterior back to one of its post-train wreck incarnations.

3. The depot's newest restaurant proposal is named for:

A. A former mayor who lives across the street.

B. The early railroad that helped develop the American West.

C. A famous battle won by Michigan soldiers who mustered there in the Civil War.

D. The neighborhood street that dead ends just north of the building.

4. What's the hold up? We're ready to place our order for dinner!

A. Seeking more support.

B. Work continues inside the building.

C. Too many food places already.

D. Seeking other options for this historic and distinguished property.

Answers:

1. D.; 2. A.B.C.D., 3. D. (Maple Street Station); 4. None of the above, from what the editor has been able to find this month.

Studio 485-2164
Antiques & Interior Accents
19 East Cross Street
Wed 12-5, Fri 12-9, Sat 10-5, Sun 1-5

REMINGTON-WALKER
Design Associates

The last minute: DTA's 21 June 1994 minutes will be published next month - due to a week's postponement of the June meeting.

A longer week at R/W

New and extended hours at our favorite decorating shop reflect the district's commitment to the real world of business. **Remington/Walker's** co-owner, Midge Prybyla, has quit her 'real job' to extend the hours of their highly successful enterprise (named after the partners' grandmothers).

When Midge and Sandy Hoag started their decorating and antique business, it was just for the weekends. Then they expanded to a larger space, usurping two whole storefronts. Customer comments had to do with their being only a weekend enterprise — and now they're open Wednesday from noon to five and Friday from noon to nine p.m. Saturdays see ten to five hours, and one to five on Sunday.

New wall at Shear Genius repairs damage from 1885

Massive brick replacement continues on the east wall outside the City Body properties as masons repair what may have originally been an interior wall.

The May 9, 1885 Saturday morning edition of *The Ypsilanti Commercial* reported "Monday Night's Blaze" describing what is thought to be a continuous block of shops which once connected Kathy Sorenson's **Shear Genius** with the **EMU Depot Town Center** (where **Olde Towne Coin & Gold** sits today).

The Commercial reported: "At about five minutes to 11 o'clock last Monday night as E.A. Wilcox, porter at the Follett House, was showing some guests, who had arrived on the night train, to their rooms, he saw fire issuing from the door of Haskin's bakery. He immediately telephoned to the central station, and started across the street. F. Bucklin and Frank Oberst had already broken open the bakery door and were carrying out the contents of the store. The fire spread rapidly both east and west, and before it was under control four old landmarks, which have been used for various purposes from thirty to forty five years, were consumed. The burned district extends from the building known as McCormick's meat market (brick) now owned by Fairchild, Smith & Co. to L.L. Forsyth's grocery (brick).

After detailing the losses at each address, *The Commercial* editorializes: "The fire, while it works harm to a few, will prove a permanent benefit to the city. Let those who have the money put up substantial brick buildings. We note as worthy of mention that the fire went from brick to brick. Had it not been for the brick walls, no telling where the flames would have gone. The barns in the rear were saved by the stillness of the night and hard work. Where the windows in Fairchild & Smith's building had iron shutters, no danger threatened. . ."

Several exterior walls in the block which were originally interior walls have been repaired in this way in recent years. The east wall between **Jas. MacDonald/Apple Annie's** and **Renewed Interest** antiques was the first major repair job on the block where another building had burned. A more recent example was the repair work done on the east wall of the **Sidetrack Grill** where the 1939 train wreck took down a building.

Me and My Sisters: Country in the City

Remember Charlotte - from Charlotte's Kitchen? Well, she wouldn't give up on the business world and she's back -- but this time with her sisters, and they're not in the food business this time. **Me and My Sisters** is the new shop at 13 East Cross and Charlotte and Sherry and Ruth (who's not a blood sister!) are in the county crafts business.

Me & My...packs a teeny, tiny shop with some of the most elegant country artifacts around and they specialize in Michigan-made crafts.

One of their display spaces, however, is definitely for the birds: In this space you'll see garden murals that shame the recent home tour variety and provide a frivolous background for hand-made and -decorated bird houses. It's a delightfully decorated space which will provide ideas for anyone's living space who wants to share it with the birds.



The 1994 Heritage Fest poster quilt design by Carolyn McKeever emphasizes the theme: "A patchwork of unity & diversity." The original was done in pastels and printed in four color offset by Goetzcraft Printers. These collectors' items will be on the street this month.

Food Co-op offers Pies

In addition to its orientation to be held at 2 p.m. on Saturday, July 16, the **Ypsilanti Food Co-op** will be featuring another Cooking Encounter on **Fresh Fruit Pies** from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. that day.

Frances Tashnick, Co-op staff member, will show how to make a perfect, healthy pie crust, as well.

The Ypsilanti Food Co-op is located at 312 N. River in Ypsilanti's Historic Depot Town. For more information call 483-1520

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Strictly local stuff: July 1994

Depot Towners are invited to participate in any or all of the following activities for the good of this old commercial district:

- **D'town Development Authority**
8 a.m. Wednesdays
at The Daily Grind
- **Depot Town Association**
Monthly Meeting
7:30 p.m., Thursday, 7/21
The Old Caboose
- **Depot Town Antique Engine Club**
7:30 pm Thursday, 7/28
at the Freighthouse Coffeeshop

THE DEPOT TOWN RAG

A publication of the Depot Town Association, Inc., a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation dedicated to preserving the unique character of the neighborhood and to the enhancement of its business climate. —Tom Dodd, editor

The Depot Town Association, Inc.
Judi D. Monaghan, president
c/o The Old Caboose
400 Market Place
Ypsilanti, Michigan 48198

Caboose work continues

Members from the **Depot Town Antique Engine Club** continue their work on the rear platform of the DTA caboose parked in the Market Plaza.

DTA is now investigating new paint and carpet for the interior. Like most of the buildings on the block, the old Caboose is an example of a new use in an old space.

Special thanks to Engine Clubbers Bill Kasper, Paul Brown, Bill Hansen, Bill Grapp, Bob Kruse, Gerry Barker and Richard Schneider for their attention to this much-loved district artifacts.



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The Michigan Central Railroad Depot in history

When the rail line was finally completed from Detroit in 1838, Harvey C. Colburn said, "the outstanding event of importance in the thirties was the coming of the railroad to Ypsilanti," in his *The Story of Ypsilanti*.

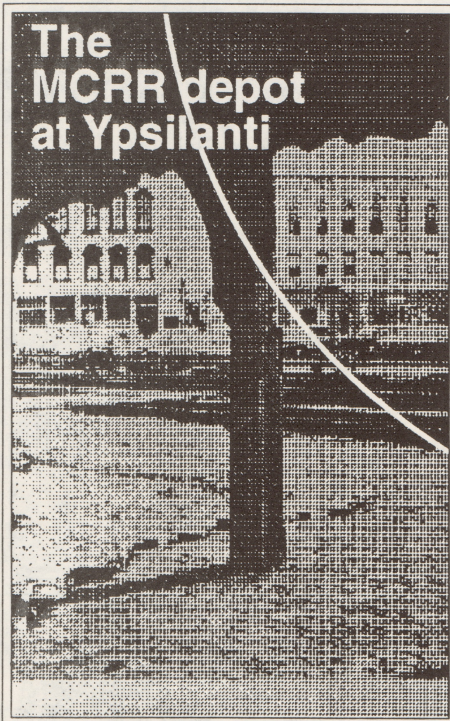
"The path of the railroad did not approach the center of the original village, probably because of the shape of the land. The decision was made to locate the depot east of the river. It seems likely that this choice was influenced by the presence of Norris' saw mill, which would supply fuel for the wood-burning locomotives and ties for railroad construction. [1976 Depot Town Plan, Macias]

An earlier wooden depot served both freight and passengers and, when the line was continued to Ann Arbor, the Great Northern Hotel was brought down and the line's most magnificent passenger edifice was constructed.

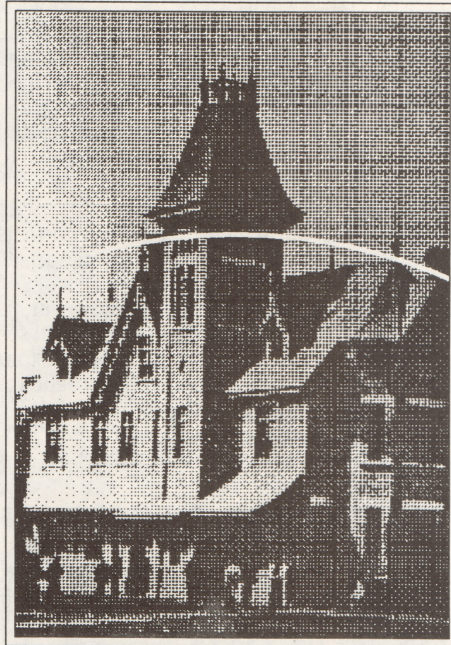
The life of the city of Ypsilanti closely followed the action at the depot and when the railroads declined after World War II, so did the neighborhoods surrounding the railyards in America.

Since the 1970's preservationist movement in many of the country's depressed districts, many of the abandoned depots became the focus of adaptive reuse - as boutiques, cookie factories, community centers, museums and even trendier promotions.

At least five different plans have surfaced since then for up-scale eateries in the Ypsi depot, but none has materialized. Several years ago the City of Ypsilanti aided in getting the Amtrack-owned building into the hands of private owners - who have repaired and secured much of the structure.

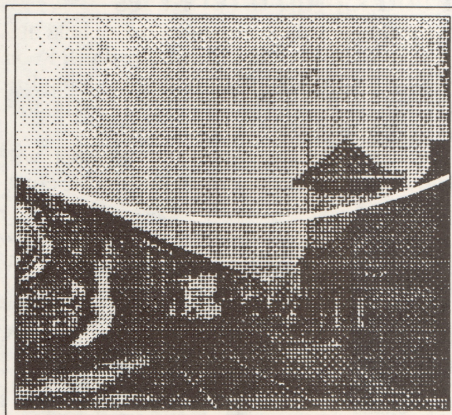


Since the trains stopped stopping here, the view from the depot has been more interesting than the view toward it. This photo was featured on a poster in the 1980s with a quote from John Huston in the movie, *Chinatown*: "Politicians, ugly buildings and whores -- all get respectable with old age."

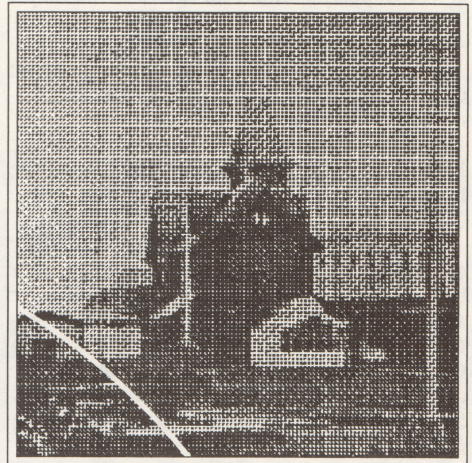


Above: The grandest depot on the Michigan Central line between Detroit and Chicago, Ypsilanti's structure was a soaring High Victorian rendition, contrasted by critics of the time to rival depots "hunkered down into gloomy Romanesque rumblings emulating sarcophagi in local cemeteries."

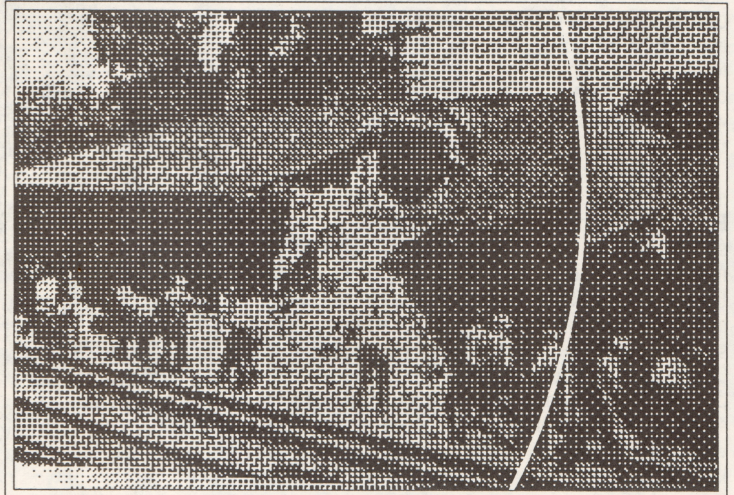
Its upper stories were removed by a fire and the first floor capped over as it remains today.



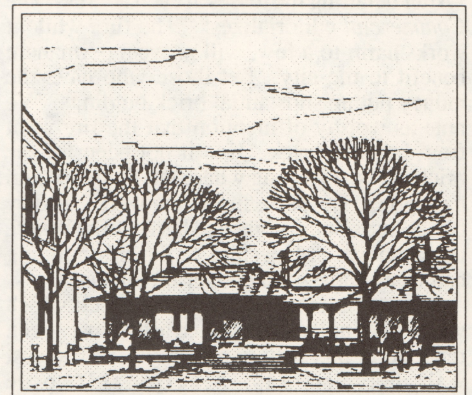
After fires and wrecks, the first floor was modified new baggage house connected by a breezeway to the telegrapher's office. The Craftsman-like tower has been replicated by today's owners with its construction scaffolding still in place several years later.



Of the many structures which have clustered around the Ypsi depot, the greenhouse which stretched toward Ann Arbor is most memorable for its production of prize-winning gardens which graced the Maple Street side of the tracks. Children handed out 'nosegays' to women passengers at this memorable stop.



1939 saw a train wreck which also took out the cigar shop next to today's Sidetrack Grill. There's a VCR video tape of the clean-up in the Ypsilanti Historical Museum. Worden Geer created it in film, originally.



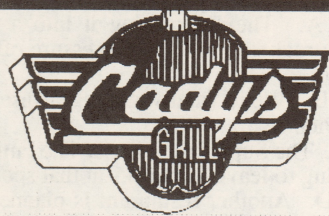
The 1976 *Depot Town Preservation Plan* by Richard Macias offered this idealized version of the MCRR depot. It's not too different from that today . . . except it's still empty.

Aubree's
Since 1873



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A Depot Town SAMPLER

'Tis the season
for promotions

Few times are more pleasant in the old railroad district than summer - when the flowers bloom and we sit outdoors and admire the restored buildings and new signs touting the creative merchandizing of our the businesses up and down the block.

Strolling the block of River and Cross streets affords shoppers views into some of the most delightful window displays to be found in any central business community today - and the district's many promotions give an ample palette for those themes throughout the year.

Last month's throngs from the Frog Island Festival found their way into Depot Town and admired the many methods our merchants found to exploit the 'green/frog/jazz' theme in their displays, on their menus, and through their advertising. Many merchants came together to support the Frog Island Program Book and place their ads and special offers intended to entice the jazz fans into the block between sets.

If we can believe the raves of many shoppers at the end of June, it worked! We've been discovered again.

Such an opportunity arrives with great regularity down in the old railroad district. A typical year's broadside of neighborhood promotions created and enjoyed by our neighbors includes:

- Spring Planting
- Frog Island Festival
- Ypsilanti Heritage Festival
- Heritage Jazz Events
- Fall Fair
- Festival of Lights
- New Year Jubilee

... and dozens of other promotions for the good of the block over the years.

Promos in recent years also included the Winter Jazz Series, Boomer Days, promotions for the Signal Tower, the Caboose and the depot. All gave the locals a creative vent for display and desing opportunities to call attention to their businesses.

This is the kind of place where, if you only wash your shop window, somebody will come in and tell you how great it looks. We're as new as the Nineteenth Century and proud of it.

Hottest little corner bar & grill in town!
Rated
best burgers!
- Detroit
Monthly



SIDETRACK
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